

Message Text

SECRET

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13-12

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IGA-02

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P R 270910Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3479

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

COMIDEASTFOR

CINCUSEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

SECDEF

S E C R E T JIDDA 0606

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, BA

SUBJECT: REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR MIDEASTFOR

REF (A) STATE 17267, (B) MANAMA 76, (C) JIDDA 99

SUMMARY: WE DO NOT THINK THAT THE SAG CAN BE INDUCED TO
MAKE A PUBLIC DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR THE RETENTION
OF MIDEASTFOR. IN RECENT MONTHS SAUDI OFFICIALS HAVE
MOVED FROM A POSITION OF PRIVATE SUPPORT AND PUBLIC SILENCE
ON A US NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE GULF TO A MORE CONSISTENT
PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ADVOCACY OF THE REMOVAL OF ALL NON-
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POLITICALFORCES FROM THE GULF. AN APPROACH AT THE PRES-

IDENTIAL LEVEL MIGHT STAND SOME CHANCE OF SUCCESS IF WE WERE PREPARED TO ARGUE THAT VERY MAJOR US INTERESTS ARE INVOLVED, BUT THIS WOULD REQUIRE A DECISION THAT RETENTION OF THE FORCE MERITS THE EXPENDITURE OF SUCH A SIZEABLE CHUNK OF US POLITICAL CAPITAL. END SUMMARY.

2. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE SAG CAN BE PERSUADED TO ISSUE A PUBLIC STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE RETENTION OF MIDEASTFOR IN BAHRAIN, IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT THERE ARE SOME ADVANTAGES TO THE SAG IN THE PRESENCE OF SUCH A US FORCE IN THE GULF. THE MOST OBVIOUS ADVANTAGE IS THE ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PROVIDED TO SAUDI SAILORS MENTIONED REF A, BUT THIS IS INITIATED BY THE SAUDI UNDERSTANDING THAT THE US IS OBLIGATED TO PROVIDE THE SAME KIND OF TRAINING IN CONNECTION WITH THE SAUDI NAVAL EXPANSION PROGRAM. THE FORCE PROBABLY ALSO HAS SOME ATTRACTIVENESS AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ONLY FRIENDLY NAVAL POWER CAPABLE OF KEEPING THE SHAH FROM TURNING THE GULF INTO A PERSIAN LAKE AT SAUDI EXPENSE.

2. HOWEVER, THERE ARE MORE COMPELLING REASONS WHY THE SAG WILL BE PREPARED TO SEE THE FORCE GO AND, IN FACT, THE PRIVATE VIEWS OF SAUDI OFFICIALS HAVE IN RECENT MONTHS SWUNG INTO LINE WITH THEIR PUBLIC POSITION THAT ALL FOREIGN NAVAL FORCES SHOULD DEPART THE GULF. THIS WAS MOST RECENTLY ENUNCIATED BY FOREIGN MINISTER PRINCE SAUD ON JANUARY 3 DURING A CALL BY THE CHARGE AND AMBASSADOR PAGANELLI WHO WAS VISITING FROM QATAR (REF C). PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE REASONS WHY THE SAG WILL BE RELUCTANT PUBLICLY TO SUPPORT RETENTION IS THAT THE SAUDI LEADERSHIP WOULD REGARD DOING SO AS INCONSISTENT WITH SAUDI ARABIA'S NEW ROLE AS A LEADER OF THE ARAB WORLD MAINTAINING CLOSE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE US BUT NO LONGER HIDING BEHIND US SKIRTS. AN APPEARANCE OF SAUDI INDEPENDENCE FROM THE US IS IMPORTANT TO THIS ROLE.

3. ADDITIONALLY, IN TERMS OF THE POLITICS OF THE GULF, THE SHAH'S UNEQUIVOCAL PUBLIC POSITION ON THE REMOVAL OF FOREIGN NAVAL FORCES HAS FURTHER TIED THE SAG'S HANDS.

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THE SAG IS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE TO STATEMENTS EMANATING FROM TEHRAN THAT IRAN HAS A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR GULF SECURITY. IN RESPONSE, SAUDI LEADERS HAVE FREQUENTLY STATED THAT THERE IS NO POWER VACUUM ON THE ARAB SIDE OF THE GULF WHICH MUST BE FILLED BY A POWER FROM ELSEWHERE IN THE GULF OR EXTERNAL TO IT. IN THIS LIGHT, PUBLICLY TO ADVOCATE RETENTION OF THE FORCE COULD BE INTERPRETED AS AN ADMISSION THAT SAUDI ARABIA IS NOT CONFIDENT OF ITS

ABILITY TO LOOK AFTER THE SECURITY OF ITS COASTS AND WATERS. IT COULD INVITE AN IRANIAN REPOSTE THAT THE IRANIAN NAVY IS CAPABLE OF LOOKING AFTER THE INTERESTS OF OTHER GULF STATES UNTIL THEY ARE PREPARED TO DO IT FOR THEMSELVES.

4. FINALLY, THE SAUDIS NO LONGER REGARD MIDEASTFOR AS QUITE THE BENIGN PRESENCE THEY ONCE CONSIDERED IT TO BE. THE SAUDIS WERE DISTURBED BY PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY US OFFICIALS EARLY LAST YEAR ON THE SUBJECT OF SEIZING THE OIL FIELDS IN CERTAIN CURCUMSTANCES AND QUITE BADLY SHAKEN BY THE SUBSEQUENT FLOOD OF ARTICLES DETAILING HOW AND WHY THIS SHOULD BE DONE. FOR A TIME THEY BELIEVED THAT THERE WAS AN ORCHESTRATED SERIES OF THREATS. "ROUTINE" OPERATIONS BY A US CARRIER TASK GROUP IN THE PERSIAN GULF LAST SPRING SEEMED TO GIVE SUBSTANCE TO THESE THREATS. SAUDI FEARS AND SUSPICIONS HAVE SINCE BEEN DISSIPATED, BUT THE SAG CAN PROBABLY NEVER AGAIN LOOK AT MIDEASTFOR IN THE SAME WAY.

5. FOR THE FOREGOING REASONS WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT AN APPROACH BY THE AMBASSADOR TO EVEN THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE SAG WOULD RESULT IN A PUBLIC SAUDI STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE RETENTION OF MIDEASTFOR. THE MOST WE COULD REASONABLY HOPE FOR WOULD BE PRIVATE SAUDI ASSURANCES TO THE GOB THAT THE SAG IS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF MIDEASTFOR IN BAHRAIN AND WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION IF THE GOB WERE TO ALLOW THE SCHEDULED DATE FOR DEPARTURE TO SLIP.

6. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT WE MIGHT GET A MORE POSITIVE RESPONSE IF THE PRESIDENT WERE TO TAKE THE MATTER UP DIRECTLY OR BY LETTER WITH KING KHALID. TO DO SO IN THE
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LIGHT OF OUR EXTENSIVE INTERESTS IN SAUDI ARABIA WOULD BE TO PORTRAY RETENTION OF THE FORCE AS A MAJOR US INTEREST IN THE REGION. BEFORE TAKING SUCH A STEP WE MUST DECIDE THAT RETENTION OF THE FORCE MERITS THE CONSIDERABLE DRAWING DOWN OF POLITICAL CAPITAL WHICH WOULD BE INVOLVED. FROM THE JIDDA PERSPECTIVE IT IS NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT THAT SUCH A STEP IS MERITED.
PORTER

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